Zebrina pendula

Edward F. Gilman

Introduction

It would be difficult to find a more colorful or faster-growing groundcover than wandering jew (Fig. 1). The purple-green leaves with broad, silvery stripes and purple undersides are produced along the succulent stems, which root wherever they touch soil. Rapidly creating a thick, 6 to 12-inch-high mat of colorful foliage, a groundcover of wandering jew will easily hide fallen litter from trees growing above it. Stems root as they touch the ground. Small, insignificant, rose-pink flowers are produced among the leaves of wandering jew all through the year.

General Information

Scientific name: Zebrina pendula
Pronunciation: zee-BRYE-nuh PEND-yoo-luh
Common name(s): Wandering Jew
Family: Commelinaceae
Plant type: herbaceous; ground cover
USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; ground cover; naturalizing; hanging basket; suitable for growing indoors; cascading down a wall
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: .5 to 1 feet
Spread: depends upon supporting structure
Plant habit: prostrate (flat); spreading
Plant density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: fine
Zebrina pendula -- Wandering Jew

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: ovate
Leaf venation: bowed
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: purple or red; variegated
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: pink
Flower characteristic: flowers periodically throughout the year

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: unknown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not applicable
Current year stem/twig color: reddish
Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: slightly alkaline; occasionally wet; clay; sand; acidic; loam
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 18 to 24 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: aggressive, spreading plant

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Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Wandering jew will grow in a variety of soils but should be planted in partial to deep shade and receive regular waterings. Plants have marginal salt-tolerance.

The cultivar ‘Purpusii’ has dark red or red-green, unstriped, hairy leaves. ‘Quadricolor’ has metallic-green leaves striped with green, red, and white. There is also a green and white cultivar available.

Propagation is by stem cuttings which root easily.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern, but occasionally bothered by mites.